

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 1630

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN- STILL IN SPARRING STAGE

REF: OTTAWA 1484

1. SUMMARY: ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS GENERATED SOME MORE HEAT BUT LITTLE MORE LIGHT THAN WHEN REPORTED REFTEL. ONLY NEW ISSUE IS DEBATE OVER QUEBEC LANGUAGE LEGISLATION AND ITS EFFECT IS STILL HARD TO ESTIMATE (SEE SEPTTEL).

OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IS NEW CAMPAIGN MANNER ADOPTED BY PRIMIN TRUDEAU, WHO IS TUB-THUMPING AND MINGLING WITH CROWDS IN FASHION FAR REMOVED FROM ALOOF 1972 POSE. TRUDEAU HAS SAID THAT MOST IMPORTANT 1974 ISSUE IS LEADERSHIP; STANFIELD HAS TRIED TO PRESENT MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE AS INFLATION. END RESULT MAY WELL HINGE ON HOW CREDIBLE AND APPEALING THE NEW TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP IMAGE CAN BE. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERALS. TRUDEAU HAS TAKEN ON AN EXHAUSTING SCHEDULE, AIMED AT BRINGING HIM INTO PERSONAL CONTACT WITH AS MANY VOTERS AS POSSIBLE. HE LANDED UNEXPECTEDLY IN WINNIPEG LAST WEEK, DURING CONSERVATIVE LEADER STANFIELD'S OFFICIALS CAMPAIGN OPENING, TO OFFER "GOODIES" IN FORM OF AIR CANADA MAINTENANCE FACILITIES, PRESUMABLY TO HELP CAMPAIGN

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OF DEFENSE MINISTER RICHARDSON, ONE OF TWO MANITOBA LIBERALS--

AND SUCCESSFULLY STEALING HEADLINES FROM STANFIELD. HE PLANS EXTENSIVE TOURS OF ONTARIO, AND PERHAPS TEN VISITS TO TORONTO. HE IS PRESENTLY ON WHISTLE-STOP TRAIN TOUR OF MARITIME PROVINCES, TALKING TO TRACK-SIDE AUDIENCES IN THE SMALL COMMUNITIES FROM SYDNEY, NOVA SCOTIA TO MONTREAL. AND WITH HIM IN MOST APPEARANCES IS MRS. TRUDEAU, A STUNNING ASSET TO ANY CAMPAIGN. LIBERALS CONTINUE TO RIDICULE CONSERVATIVE PROPOSALS FOR WAGE AND PRICE FREEZES, HOWEVER TEMPORARY, AND LAMBASTE OPPOSITION FOR FORCING "UNNECESSARY" ELECTION. LIBERALS FOR PRESENT APPEAR UNSHAKEABLE IN QUEBEC, BUT UNLIKELY TO GAIN MUCH IF ANYTHING IN MARITIMES, PRARIES, AND BRITISH COLUMBIA. KEY IS ONTARIO, WHERE MANY LIBERAL INCUMBENTS, WHO WON NARROW VICTORIES IN 1972, FACE STIFF OPPOSITION FROM NEW AND ATTRACTIVE TORY CANDIDATES. TRUDEAU'S PERSONALITY WILL HAVE MUCH TO DO WITH OUTCOME. TO DATE, HIS BARNSTORMING HAS PROBABLY BEEN HELPFUL AND HIS ENTHUSIASTIC MANNER HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A FRIENDLY REACTION FROM GOOD-SIZED CROWDS.

3. PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES. IN CONTRAST WITH TRUDEAU, ROBERT STANFIELD SEEMS QUITE UNABLE AND UNWILLING TO CHANGE HIS SPOTS. HE IS RUNNING MUCH THE SAME STOLID, TIRELESS BUT COLORLESS CAMPAIGN HE DID IN 1972, WITH EMPHASIS ON DEPENDABILITY. HARE AND TORTOISE COMPARISON HAS ELUDED PRACTICALLY NO COMMENTATORS. TORY SOURCES TELL EMBASSY STANFIELD IS PACING HIMSELF CAREFULLY, BUT MILEAGE ALREADY COVERED IS IMPRESSIVE. CONSERVATIVES ARE TALKING LIKE WINNERS-- HAVE ORGANIZED A SMOOTH AND SLICK CAMPAIGN-- HAMMERING AT GOVERNMENT FAILURE TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION AGAINST INFLATION-- AND AGAINST TRUDEAU PERSONALLY (" NEITHER CREDIBLE NOR BEARABLE") THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN WIN SEVERAL SEATS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ONTARIO, ENOUGH AT LEAST TO ESTABLISH A PLURALITY IN COMMONS. PROBLEM REMAINS QUEBEC. STANFIELD WILL APPARENTLY BE CONSERVATIVE STANDARD BEARER IN THE PROVINCE, SINCE "LIEUTENANT" CLAUDE WAGNER HAS WON LITTLE CONFIDENCE THERE. BUT STANFIELD'S LABORIOUS FRENCH AND DULL PLATFORM MANNER ARE AGAINST HIM. FURTHER, HE HAS BEEN EMBARRASSED BY CONSERVATIVE NOMINATION OF MONCTON, N.B. MAYOR JONES, AN OPPONENT OF BILINGUALISM. STANFIELD HAS VETOED THE NOMINATION, BUT JONES MAY RUN AS AN INDEPENDENT. INCIDENT MAY DASH TORY HOPES OF

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RETAINING THE MONCTON SEAT. CHANCES ARE THAT CONSERVATIVES WILL INCREASE UQUEBEC REPRESENTATION ONLY marginally IF AT ALL.

4. NEW DEMOCRATS. DAVID LEWIS IS STUMPING WITH HIS USUAL VERVE, INVEIGHING AGAINST EXCESS CORPORATE PROFITS, WITH EMPHASIS ON MULTINATIONALS. HE HAS USED HIS MOST CRITICAL LANGUAGE ON THE CONSERVATIVES, DESCRIBING STANFIELD

AS RIP VAN STANFIELD, CALLING THE SUGGESTED WAGE AND PRICE FREEZE NONSENSE, AND WARNING AGAINST DANGER OF TORY GOVERNMENT, (NOT SURPRISINGLY, LEWIS DOES NOT MENTION THAT HIS WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPORT OF TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT IS WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT ABOUT THE PRESENTU "DANGER"). IT IS GENERALLY CONCEDED THAT NDP WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY HOLDING ITS 31 SEATS, WHICH IS APPROXIMATE HIGH WATER MARK. SEVERAL NDP INCUMBENTS ARE ELDERLY OR IN INDIFFERENT HEALTH. LEWIS HAS A HARD AND PROBABLY UPHILL FIGHT TO MAINTAIN PRESENT NDP STRENGHT. QUESTION WHICH HAS SO FAR ELUDED ANSWER IS WHICH PARTY WOULD BENEFIT FROM EVEN A SLIGHT SWING AWAY FROM NDP: LIBERALS OR CONSERVATIVES?

5. SOCIAL CREDIT. LEADER REAL CAQUETTE HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR CHECKUP, AND DESPITE DENIALS THERE ARE CONTINUED RUMORS ABOUT HIS BAD HEALTH. (HE IS A DIABETIC, AND CAMPAIGN FOOD HAS EXACERBATED HIS CONDITION.) WITHOUT CAQUETTE, SOCREDS WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY KEEPING 1972 STRENGTH IN QUEBEC. TORIES HOPE TO WIN SEVERAL SOCRED RIDINGS IN QUEBEC, BUT LIKE QUESTION CONCERNING NDP DEFECTORS, IT IS REALLY NOT POSSIBLE TO SAY WHETHER THE LIBERALS OR THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD BENEFIT FROM A DECLINE IN THE SOCRED VOTE. CERTAINLY THERE IS A BASIC "LIBERAL" PULL IN QUEBEC.

6. CONCLUSION. OUTCOME REMAINS UNCERTAIN AND MAY YET DEPEND ON SLIPS, SLAPS, AND SURPRISES. ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THAT CONSERVATIVES ARE AN ICH AHEAD AT COMMENCEMENT OF SERIOUS CAMPAINGING ON GROUND THEY HAVE NOT HAD A TRY SINCE 1963 AND LIBERALS' TEAM IS OUT OF FRESH MIRACLES, 1974 CAMPAIGN IS STILL IN THE SPARRING STAGE WITH NO CLEARLY PERCEPTIBLE TREND APPARENT.

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